

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 DHA-02 IO-13 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 OMB-01
/091 W

-----150325Z 074435 /73

R 141617Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6420
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 2590

RABAT FOR UNDER SECRETARY HABIB

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SHUM, TS
SUBJECT: "LIBERALS" CALL FOR NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN
RIGHTS

REF: TUNIS 2299, TUNIS 2378

1. TUNISIA'S "LIBERAL" OPPOSITION GROUPEMENT HAS ISSUED A CALL
FOR A "NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC LIBERTIES" TO ANALYZE
THE GOT'S ALLEGED FAILURE TO RESPECT BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS. THIS CALL
WAS INCLUDED IN "LIBERAL" TRACT, DATED APRIL 12, WHICH IS
NO CIRCULATING IN TUNIS. IT HAS BEEN SIGNED BY
168 PERSONS, WHO ARE LARGELY PROFESSIONALS BASED IN TUNIS
BUT INCLUDE SEVEN FORMER GOT MINISTERS (AMONG THEM AHMED
MESTIRI, BEJI CAID ESSEBSI AND HASSIB BEN AMMAR). THE
"LIBERAL" TRACT ALLEGES THAT THE GOT HAS FAILED TO APPROVE
ESTABLISHMENT OF TUNISIAN CHAPTER OF "LEAGUE FOR THE RIGHTS
OF MAN," HAS REFUSED TO ALLOW PUBLICATION OF UNSPECIFIED
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NEWSPAPTYDN HAS INCREASED ARBITRARY ARRESTS IN CASES
INVOLVING EXPRESSION OF OPINION, HAS ABUSED ITS POWER TO
HOLD PERSONS FOR INVESTIGATION, AND HAS ENDANGERED THE
INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY.

2. THE TRACT NAMES A FIVE-MEMBER COMMITTEE (INCLUDING
HASSIB BEN AMMAR, FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER; HABIB BOULARES,

FORMER CULTURE AND INFORMATION MINISTER, AND PRESENTLY A WRITER FOR JEUNE AFRIQUE, AND HAMMOUDA BEN SLAMA, A LEADER OF THE TUNISIAN PHYSICIANS' ASSOCIATION) THAT WILL TRY TO ORGANIZE LOCAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS. MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE HAVE TOLD US THAT THEY DO NOT EXPECT THE GOT TO ALLOW THEM TO HOLD THE CONFERENCE AND THEY HAVE ALREADY BEGUN TO CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF EXPRESSING THEIR CONCERN OVER HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTION IN TUNISIA. AMONG THESE OPTIONS ARE, THEY TELL US, AN INFORMATION CAMPAIGN IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES. THEY ALSO PLAN TO UNDERTAKE A CAMPAIGN IN CONJUNCTION WITH JEUNE AFRIQUE DIRECTOR BECHIR BEN YAHMED FOR IMPROVED OBSERVANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS THROUGHOUT AFRICA.

3. AFTER HAVING BEEN TOLD BY GOT THAT THEY WOULD BE GIVEN APPROVAL FOR THEIR LEAGUE FOR THE RIGHTS OF MAN (SEE TUNIS 2378), "LIBERALS" NOW BELIEVE THAT GOVERNMENT IS BACKING OUT AND WILL NOT APPROVE LEAGUE. THEIR SOURCES IN GOT TELL THEM THAT TUG OF WAR IS GOING ON BETWEEN CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERALIZING ELEMENTS WITHIN THE KPSD POLITICAL BUREAU AND THAT THE CONSERVATIVES, LED BY PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA, DEFENSE MINISTER FARHAT AND PARTY DIRECTOR SAYAH, ARE WINNING OUT.

4. "LIBERAL" CALL FOR A CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS WILL NOT PLEASE GOT. COMING AT A TIME WHEN GOT FEELS SERIOUSLY THREATENED BY LIBYAN LEADER QADHAFI AND WHILE BEN SALAHISTS ARE UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR ALLEGED SUBVERSION, "LIBERAL" INITIATIVE IS LIKELY TO BE SEEN AS CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO FURTHER EMBARRASS AND UNDERMINE REGIME. PUBLICATION OF CONFIDENTIAL

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THIS PETITION IS CONSISTENT WITH "LIBERAL" STRATEGY OF KEEPING UP PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT BY SERIES OF ACTIONS DESIGNED TO FORCE GOT INTO DIALOGUE WITH OPPOSITION FORCES. "LIBERALS" CLAIM THEY PLAN TO KEEP THESE ACTIONS WITHIN CONFINES OF FREEDOMS GUARANTEED BY CONSTITUTION AND TUNISIAN LAW, AND THAT THEY WANT TO AVOID GOING "UNDERGROUND" OR TAKING ACTIONS WHICH WOULD PREJUDICE THEIR CLAIM OF LEGALITY. THEIR APRIL 12 TRACT, HOWEVER, MAY BE POORLY RECEIVED BY GOT AND COULD PLACE IN JEOPARDY THEIR PRIVILEGED STATUS AS THE TAME, TOLERATED OPPOSITION. MULCAHY

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Message Attributes

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